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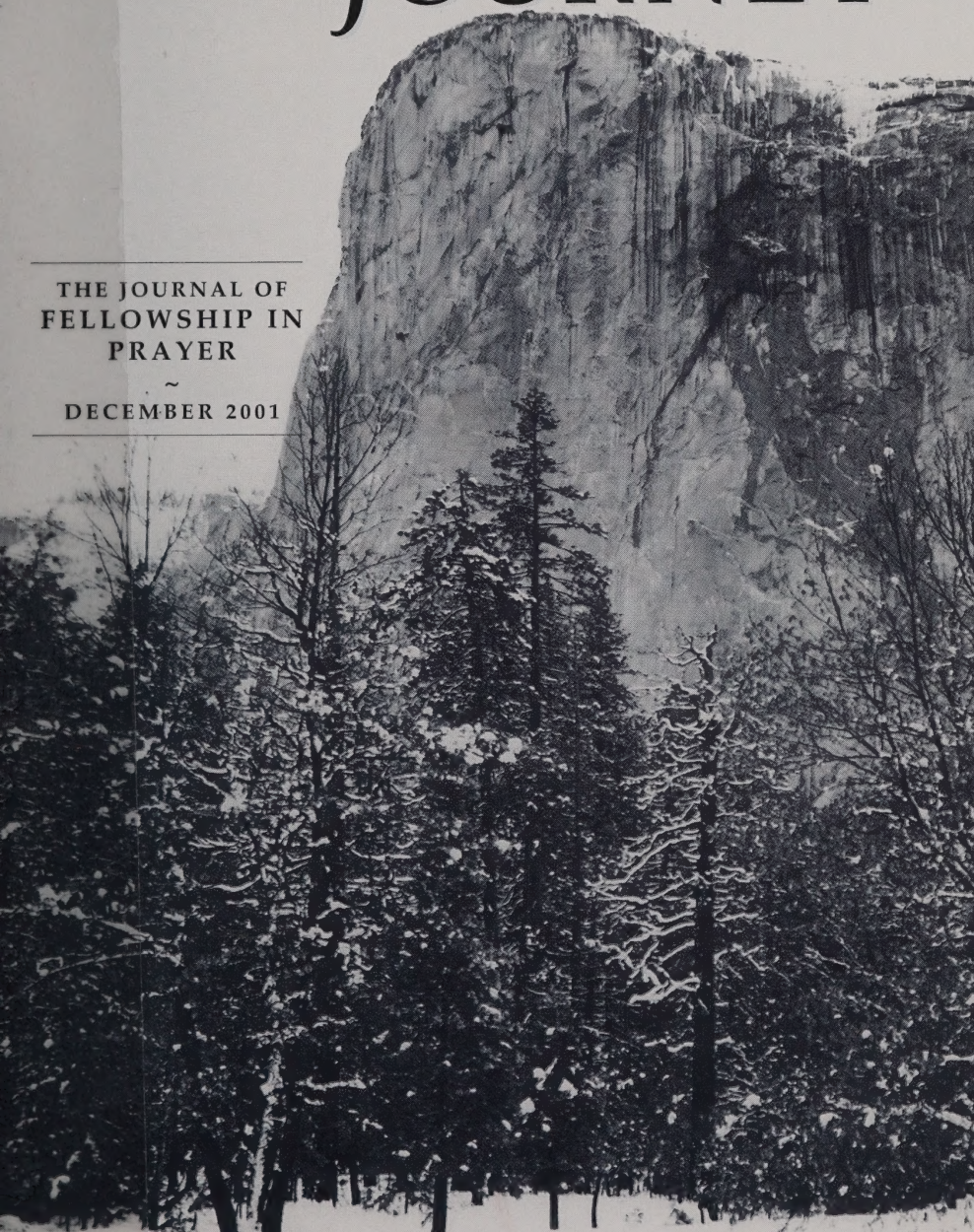
SACRED JOURNEY



THE JOURNAL OF
FELLOWSHIP IN
PRAYER

~

DECEMBER 2001

SACRED JOURNEY®

THE JOURNAL OF FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER

The mission of Fellowship in Prayer is

to encourage and support

a spiritual orientation to life,

to promote the practice of

prayer,

meditation,

and service to others,

and to help bring about

a deeper spirit of unity

among humankind.

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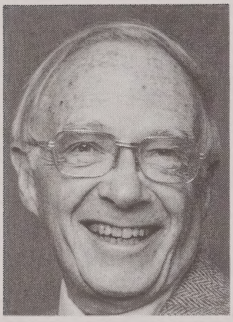
Cover photo by Robert Campbell.

LOVE AND SERVE GOD AND EACH OTHER



This month we celebrate the birth of a way of life that has the power to transform us and our world. The path of love, compassion, and wisdom taught by Jesus—and shared by all the world's religions—can lead to a world at peace, if only....if only what?

If only we thought, spoke, and acted in accordance with the Sermon on the Mount? In times like these, it is not easy to turn the other cheek, or treat everyone with loving kindness, no matter who he is or where he lives, or what he does to us or our country.

Fortunately, you and I are not asked to make the hard decisions about how our government should respond to terrorism. We *are* asked to love and serve God and each other—all sentient beings—*every* day of the year. We are asked to pray—not just for those whose religious beliefs are the same as ours, but for *all* women and men everywhere, of every religious persuasion or none. As Suzin Green tells us later in this issue, we are asked to root out the terrorist hiding in each one of us; to transform that negative energy into something vital and useful and loving for us and for the whole world. How do we go about doing that?

Thich Nhat Hanh, the Vietnamese Buddhist master and peace activist, asks those who follow the Bodhisattva's Way of Compassion to bring joy to one person in the morning and to ease the pain of one person in the afternoon. The happiness and well-being of others is essential to our own happiness, he tells us. We know, he says, that every word, every look, every action and every smile can bring happiness to others. We know that if we follow the way of Jesus we ourselves may become an inexhaustible source of peace and joy for our loved ones and for all sentient beings, this Christmas and every day of our lives.

THE SINGING ISSUE

A shared sadness settled over millions last September. Mourning was etched on face after face from city to countryside. That first night after the terror attacks, I found my way to my church. In the company of others, some of whom had narrowly escaped to the suburbs with their lives, we sat in silence; we recited prayers we knew by heart; we listened to ancient holy words of comfort, and we lit candles for those lost; we wept and we sang.

For days afterward, I felt deaf to words. So many were spoken but so few made sense. All I could really hear was the music. Stately anthems, sacred hymns, strains of a solitary violin, the sadness of one bagpipe followed by another punctuated the silence and seeped into inner places where words simply could not reach.

This issue, delivered to you as the holiday season approaches, would sing to you if black type printed on a white page could. It would sing the songs of the season and those of the spirit that bring joy and sustenance and hope even in terrible times.

In *Questions & Answers*, two separate interviews introduce the spiritual practice of sacred chanting. Suzin

Green describes *kirtan* chanting, a devotional practice from the Hindu yogic tradition. Then Jeffrey Markay, a Methodist minister, introduces the community of Taizé, an ecumenical Christian monastery in France, where thousands flock to sit in silence and prayerfully chant in several languages. These two ways of chanting arise from very different religious traditions, but both invite practitioners to chant the same words over and over until they unlock something sacred.

Joan Borysenko, who will be a keynote speaker at next summer's "Companions on the Sacred Journey" conference, shows how even a terrible day can be redeemed by gratitude. In *Ways of Prayer*, Peter Ilgenfritz honestly testifies to the power of praying a prayer, even one you don't wholeheartedly like, until it changes you. In *A Transforming Experience* John Dear recounts the days when he realized that Jesus really meant it when he said, "Blessed are the peacemakers."

When the holidays get hectic, follow Rachel Harris' advice in *Spiritual Practice* and take a mini retreat while listening to ecstatic music. If buying gifts threaten to obscure the importance of the season, we can learn simplicity from Kathleen Diegnan who writes in *Spiritual Community* about the Shakers, a truly American group known both for its simple chants and creativity. In stressful times, take a deep breath. Read one of this issue's poems. Recite Nan Merrill's prayer.

When this issue reaches you, we may have peace in the world or we may not. Whatever our lot, we can still give voice to what angels once proclaimed, "Peace on earth. Good will toward all." Join the chorus. The world needs to hear you sing.

Suzin Green

Sacred Chants: Two Views

Suzin Green

Suzin Green's spiritual awakening began at the piano nearly three decades ago. Late at night, as a classical musician and young mother too tired to practice, she began improvising. She says, "I would sit down at the piano and I'd begin to feel my head open up and this powerful light moved through me and the music came out of my fingers. I didn't know what the light was." Determined to find out more about the light, she became a student of Eastern philosophies and practices.

She spent nearly two decades studying with the Siddha yoga master, Baba Muktananda. Today, Suzin teaches Devi Yoga, a system of practice that draws on wisdom teachings from Hinduism, Buddhism, Sufism, and Goddess spirituality.

As a musician with a special interest in Indian devotional music she has released two albums. Suzin's compact disc Hearts on Fire *can be ordered at cdfreedom.com.* Dream Shield Journey *can be ordered by contacting* Sacred Journey. *Music clips can be downloaded from our website.*

Suzin will present a kirtan *concert during the "Companions on the Sacred Journey" conference, June 14-16, 2002 in Princeton.*

Sacred Journey: **What is *kirtan*?**

Suzin Green: *Kirtan* is a call-and-response form of devotional chanting that comes out of the Hindu yogic tradition. *Kirtan* is a folk tradition, an ancient sacred art, that is accessible to anyone. You sit down in a group and the leader sings the lead line and you sing back the response line.

Kirtan is an absolutely glorious practice. It opens the heart like nothing I've ever experienced. It has an amazing ability to align a person from the inside out. It is extremely energizing. It releases so much joy and power and light. Chanting also makes meditation come much more easily.

If I am having a bad day and my energy is all distorted and I spend an hour chanting mantras, they balance me. We all want to cultivate our lightness, but it's hard because gravity is always pulling us down. Somehow chanting seems to strengthen the light so the light can sit in a proper balance with gravity. I am convinced that chanting strengthens our ability to hold the light.

What do you chant?

Most of what we chant is in Sanskrit, and that's an amazing language. Sanskrit is considered an energy-based language rather than a meaning-based language. When we communicate in English, I say certain words that have meaning, you hear it and process it. In Sanskrit it is more like the energy of the word is breaking open inside the person. For instance, we chant a mantra like the familiar, *Om Namah Shivaya*. We can translate this mantra as "Salutations to the Indwelling Self" or "Salutations to Shiva, the Great Heart of Being." We can make all sorts of translations, but an energetic experience takes place in

the person who is chanting or singing. This is what gives a Sanskrit mantra it's juice. We are working to ignite energetic potentials that already exist inside of us.

Why would "igniting" sacred energies be transforming?

From our perspective the soul is made up of many different strands of energy, what we would call the subtle body. Some of the energy strands are wonderfully divine and others have blockages or constrictions or wounds. These strands weave together and form the energetic core of the human being. Chanting Sanskrit mantras activates the divine energies and as they get bigger and fatter and healthier, they push away or eat up the energies that are less wonderful.

You use the term Devi Yoga when you teach. Is this your own system of yoga?

Definitely. *Devi* is the Sanscrit word for goddess. It translates as the "shining." The inner meaning of the deities is that they are the inner light, the shining light of consciousness. I feel so much integrity and authenticity teaching what I call Devi Yoga, because it grew out of such a long, devoted, careful practice. I teach my students meditation practice, two kinds of chanting—mantra and *kirtan*— I encourage people to sing with their whole being, to melt into these sacred names. The heart of devotion is to merge with the great heart of being.

Devi Yoga is about creating the container for luminous light. The practices that I teach are basically traditional yogic practices: mantra, meditation, *kirtan*, and hatha yoga (body postures). I may put a goddess spin on them. I may talk in a modern way and bring in archetypal psychology and other references that modern

Western people can identify with, but the practices are ancient classical practices.

So many of us want to hold all the light, but we have so many wounds and neuroses and that makes for a very leaky container. We may have a great experience and go on a weekend retreat but come home and one funny look from someone, one argument with a spouse, one run-in with a teenaged child and all the insight, wonder, and good feeling leaks right out. The practices I teach and the way I work with people are all about strengthening the container of being so it can hold the light, which is the deity—the shining light—and then radiate the light. To me the practices are turning the mind/body instrument into a beautiful, scintillating container that doesn't leak. Then nothing but light and beauty come from us.

Chanting as a devotional practice is also about becoming the nectar, the sweetness that is so much a part of humanness that often gets lost. All of the great devotional practices are about our becoming the sweetest, most tender and loving heart. A heart like that can do wonders in this world. Especially now, while we are all still thinking of the nightmare that happened on September 11th.

For each one of us the challenge is to do as much as we can to give help and continue to support the people whose lives have been absolutely touched by this and to communicate to our leaders wisdom and sane action. The other piece of that is our own inner work. This is forcing me to look and ask: Where does the inner terrorist live inside of me? We all need to do the contemplation and soul searching to keep finding pockets of that inner terrorist and work with that energy so it can transform into something vital and useful and beneficial for us and for the planet.

Jeffrey Markay

A decade ago, Rev. Jeffrey Markay, Senior Pastor of the Caldwell, New Jersey United Methodist Church, was on a Fulbright Scholarship studying religion at the University in Giessen. Jeff recalls, "People who knew of my spiritual hunger and searching began encouraging me to spend some time in the Community of Taizé in France. I did and part of my heart came alive." Jeff is one of hundreds of thousands of young adults who have travelled to Taizé, a tiny village near Cluny in the Burgundy Region.

Jeff will lead a Taizé service at the "Companions on the Sacred Journey" conference, June 14-16, 2002. More information on Taizé is available at www.taize.fr.

Sacred Journey: **What is Taizé prayer?**

Rev. Jeff Markay: Taizé prayer reflects the life, rhythm and spirit of prayer that is experienced in the ecumenical Christian community in the village of Taizé, France. Praying in the tradition of Taizé is to sing chants, hear scripture, practice *Lectio Divina* (sacred scripture reading) while listening for a word from God. These aspects of the Taizé prayer service are read, sung, and prayed in languages that are mostly representative of the cultures from Eastern and Western Europe. Taizé prayer is done by Christians throughout the world, and reflects the cultures around them.

Why does chanting by repeating the same phrases, many in languages other than your own, have a positive spiritual impact on people?

Chanting scriptures and songs about God's presence has a way of becoming part of our prayer life, our breathing, our very self. The words are like a Christian mantra that molds us, shapes us, and brings wisdom into the simplicity and complexity of God. Chanting these Taizé chants in other languages helps us to appreciate the spiritual life going on in cultures other than our own. It gives us access into cultures, spiritualities, and faithful expressions that are different than ours, but come from the same Spirit. It is a reminder that God is bigger than our understanding of God, and that the Christian faith and church is much more grand and diverse than the part of the Body of Christ which is familiar to us.

How did Taizé begin?

Brother Roger was a seminary student in the years before

World War II who discerned a call to leave his native Switzerland and go to this little village of Taizé, France in order to live a life of simplicity, prayer, and community. A few others joined him as they lived a life similar to the order of St. Benedict. As the years went on they discerned their own Rule of Taizé which now guides their spiritual and communal life.

Why is Taizé growing in popularity?

Taizé is so popular because it provides spiritual food for hungry people. The Taizé ministry is primarily to young adults who are searching for a faith that has integrity, meaning and sustenance. The example of the brothers and the radical hospitality that welcomes pilgrims from all over the world is a sign to people that God is alive and yearning to be in relationship with us all. Taizé prayer provides an opportunity to listen for God, to seek communion with God and to pray in ways that are meditative, reflective, and peace-filled. I think Taizé prayer and singing Taizé chants is growing in popularity because it honors the mystical part of our humanity and reminds us that Christian faith and worship is so much deeper than just our thoughts.

How is Taizé prayer different from most church services?

Taizé prayer is not afraid of silence, and in fact prioritizes silent time for worshipers to listen, pray and be still in God's presence. The silence between chants, as well as the long silence after the scriptures are read, allow people to listen with the ears of their hearts and experience the presence of God in the still, small voice of the divine within and among us. Taizé prayer is an invitation to go deeper into our own prayer life, and ever closer to the heart of God.

Why is there such strong appeal for the young?

Sometimes churches think that youth are only interested in pizza and social events. Many youth are looking for a faith that is real, that has meaning and integrity. They see through things and people that are not real and that disrespect their intelligence and capabilities. Taizé prayer honors the natural spiritual hunger that many young adults are in touch with. Taizé prayer crosses boundaries of race, nationality, class, gender and other divides. Youth throughout Europe flock to Taizé by the hundreds of thousands each year.

How has this form of prayer shaped your spiritual life?

Many of the chants have shaped and molded my theology, my understanding of the spiritual life, and my appreciation for the global Body of Christ, the Church. Taizé has made me more aware of the rich monastic tradition within the Christian Church. I do thank God for the way Taizé prayer has opened my heart to the mystical, meditative side of the Christian faith. Taizé has brought me in touch with my spiritual roots from Europe and the Eastern Church. And so God can use me as God wishes: a Christian from North America, who thinks like a United Methodist and has at least one of the ventricles of my heart in the monastic and mystical heritage of the Christian church.

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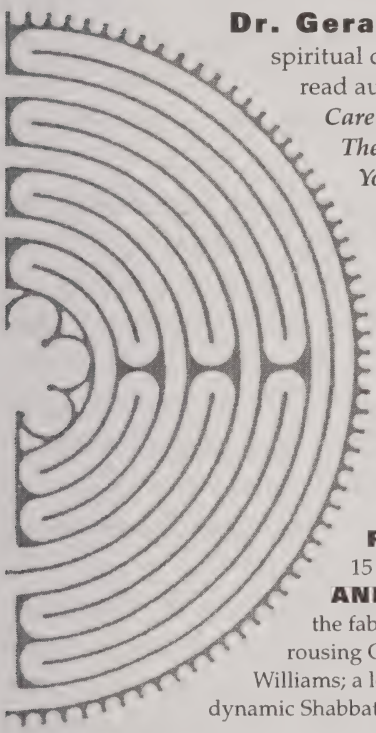

Dr. Gerald (Jerry) May,
spiritual director, psychiatrist and widely-read author of *Addiction and Grace, Care of Mind/Care of Spirit,* and *The Awakened Heart: Opening Yourself to the Love You Need*

and

Joan Borysenko,
a leading authority on women's spirituality and author of best-selling books, *A Woman's Book of Life, Minding the Body/Mending the Mind, A Woman's Journey to God,* and *Seven Paths to God: The Ways of the Mystic*

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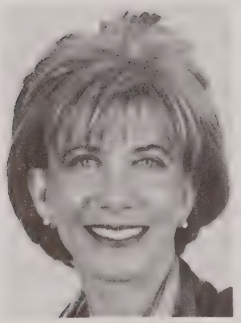
To be added to the list, e-mail us at **heck@sacredjourney.org.** or write to us at 291 Witherspoon Street, Princeton, New Jersey 08542-3227.

Cultivate Gratitude

Joan Borysenko



The attitude of gratitude is the culmination of all the strategies for inner peace. When you learn to manage your mind, take care of yourself, relate to others with compassion and kindness, and develop a mindful approach to life, gratitude will arise all by itself. In the meantime, you can practice it. A little run-in with a big German shepherd helped me do just that.

One clear winter's day, I decided to take a walk in the tiny Colorado wilderness town where we live. The sky was a shade of blue peculiar to the higher elevations of the Rockies. The early sun poured like liquid gold through the limbs of tall spruce trees, creating dancing patterns of light in the delicate crystals of freshly

Joan Borysenko will be a keynote speaker at the "Companions on the Sacred Journey" conference June 14-16, 2002 in Princeton. Joan is one of the leading experts on stress, spirituality, and the mind/body connection. She is the author of ten books and this excerpt is from her most recent title, Inner Peace for Busy People *©2001 by Joan Borysenko. Published by Hay House. Used by permission.*

fallen snow. Mountain peaks rose majestically in sculpted layers of purples, greens, and grays, piercing clouds that hung like fairy mist in the enchanted layers below.

Marching resolutely down the road, I was all but blind to the extraordinary beauty. Attempting to relax before driving down the mountain to undergo a breast biopsy at the local hospital, I was reviewing the menu of calamitous medical possibilities that might materialize. As my mind slid into well-worn patterns of awfulizing, it gathered momentum. Not only might my body be in mortal danger, but life wasn't working so well in other ways either. Not only did the glass seem half-empty, but the remaining water appeared downright polluted. I felt overworked and burned out. What kind of crazy life had I managed to create, especially when I am supposed to be some kind of role model for others? Guilt, fear, anger, and disappointment joined the cacophony of inner voices accompanying me down the road on my attempt at a mindful, relaxing walk.

I was rudely awakened from my toxic reverie by a searing pain in my hindquarters. Utterly focused on scary mental movies, I had been completely oblivious to the speedy approach of a large German shepherd who bounded up and bit me unceremoniously on the behind. My mental movie theater immediately began to run a feature film starring my bare buttocks being sutured in the Boulder Community hospital room, while I was simultaneously being injected with huge doses of tetanus toxins and rabies vaccine. I would, no doubt, miss my biopsy and have to undergo that second round of medical torture on another day.

....I slipped behind a bush and pulled my pants down.

While a large red welt, framed by the impression of a perfect set of canine teeth, graced my derriere, the skin was unbroken. With a yelp of pure joy, I pulled up my pants and burst from the bushes with a whoop of gratitude. No emergency room. No tetanus shots. No slow death from rabies. I could get to the biopsy on time. Lucky me.

Suddenly, the entire scene seemed hysterically funny. The dog was transformed from a nasty cur to a divine messenger. "Wake up, you silly human! Feel the sun on your face and the wind in your hair. You're alive and the world is beautiful. The mountains are magnificent, and the day is young. There are endless possibilities to experience, and worlds to create." I was overwhelmed with gratitude for the gift of life. Every breath was precious, every tree a miracle. Peace settled around me like a down quilt.

Wake up, you silly human. Feel the sun on your face.

Gratitude is like a gearshift that can move your mental mechanism from obsession to peacefulness, from rigidity to creativity, from fear to love. The ability to relax and be mindfully present in the moment comes naturally when you're grateful. One of the most delightful aspects of my Jewish heritage is the saying of *Brachot*—blessings or prayers of thanksgiving throughout the day. These are praises of God for creating a world of vast wonder. There is a blessing upon seeing a star or a rainbow. There is a blessing for the gifts of food, wine, and water. There's even a bathroom blessing for internal organs that function so well. I like to add impromptu blessings throughout the day. Thanks for German shepherds who teach us peace at the most unlikely times. Thanks, too, for a biopsy that was

negative—one of the few instances where a negative turns out to be positive.

This week, when you find yourself awfulizing, try focusing on gratitude for all the things that are right. Years ago, I learned an exercise from the Benedictine monk, Brother David Steindl-Rast, author of the beautiful book, *Gratefulness: The Heart of Prayer*. He suggested that every night before bed, you say thanks for something that you've never thought about being grateful for before. It's easy for the first few weeks, but then you really have to think to come up with something new. If you continue the exercise (which takes almost no time, you'll be happy to realize) for a few months, you'll begin noticing things to be grateful for throughout the day, knowing that you'll need something new to be thankful for that night. This simple exercise makes you mindful and has the power to change your life.

A Meditation and Mandala

Nan C. Merrill

O Divine Lover, fill the hearts of your people
with compassion and mercy
burn away our fears and doubts
with your fire!
O Wisdom of the ages, open our heart's eyes,
beam light into the darkness of ignorance.
Awaken us that oppression and injustice
might cease!

How long! How long will our wanton ways,
our apathy, mediocracy, and squandering
of resources go on?
Daughters of love, sons of light, arise!
Teach us songs that enlighten the soul;
reconnect our spirits to the holy
oneness of all creation!
For darkness reigns over the world in
these times.
Yet the light shall free us from
darkness as
we choose the way of truth.
May it soon be so!

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Morning Prayer

Peter Ilgenfritz

O Lord, grant me to greet the coming day in peace. Help me in all things to rely upon thy holy will. In every hour of the day reveal thy will to me. Bless my dealings with all who surround me. Teach me to treat all that comes to me throughout the day with peace of soul and with firm conviction that thy will governs all. In all my deeds and words guide my thoughts and feelings. In unforeseen events let me not forget that all are sent by thee. Teach me to act firmly and wisely without embittering and embarrassing others. Give me strength to bear the fatigue of the coming day with all that it shall bring. Direct my will, teach me to pray, pray thou thyself in me. Amen.

Peter Ilgenfritz is a member of the clergy team at University Congregational United Church of Christ in Seattle, Washington. Peter and his partner, Dave Shull, were the first gay couple to be called as ministers to a mainline Protestant church. He traveled to St. Petersburg with a delegation of the Seattle Sister Churches Program, a program of the Church Council of Greater Seattle founded to promote religious exchange and understanding between peoples with very different cultures, religious practices, and experiences.

I have been living with this prayer for the past several months; praying it each morning, tripping over some words, arguing with others, and letting others rest in me.

The prayer was written by Philaret, the Metropolitan of the Russian Orthodox Church in Moscow. I came across it when I traveled to St. Petersburg.

I lived with the prayer during my vacation and kept arguing with the sentence, "In unforeseen events, let me not forget that all are sent by thee."

On the one hand, I do not agree with that sentence at all. I do not believe that all that happens to us is sent by God or is somehow predetermined to happen to us. I just do not believe that, and, at times, that has made me want to cast this prayer aside.

But as I have continued with the discipline of praying and living with this prayer, I have noticed a shift, a change in how I have held the unforseen parts of my days. All may not be sent by God. To believe that would be to believe in some sadistic, cruel, hard-taskmaster God in whom I do not believe. But all that life sends, foreseen and especially the unforeseen, can be occasions for God's presence, love, and grace to be revealed, if only we are open to it.

In my day to day life, the small things, the traffic light that I missed, the toast that is burnt, the fan that is broken easily become occasions for grief, regret, and rage. I am beginning to see that all of these things can, through the eyes of prayer, be occasions to see into the unforeseen in a new way. The other day as I sat fuming at the traffic light I just missed which made me even later for an appointment, I remembered Philaret's prayer. Something came over me. I breathed in the grace of the moment, and

paused to accept it as an invitation to slow down, to be mindful, and to pray. I arrived at my appointment no later than planned, but with far more grace than I could have imagined.

To wait, to pause, to breathe in, to be open to the awesome mystery who holds all....to say thanks for a day now ended and for all that has been given, these are gifts given to me from a prayer that I said until it now lives in me.

Janet Gnall

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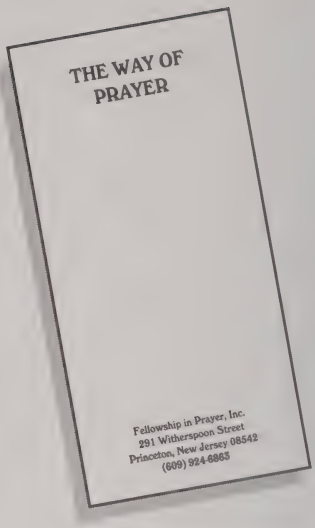

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Please use this space to tell us your thoughts about this publication, *Sacred Journey.*

ILLUMINATIONS

Don't surrender your loneliness
So quicky.
Let it cut more deep.

Let it ferment and season you
As few human
Or even divine ingredients can.

Something missing in my heart tonight,
Has made my eyes so soft,
My voice
So tender,

My need of God
Absolutely
Clear.

~Hafiz

Nothing that is worth doing can be achieved in a lifetime; therefore we must be saved by hope. Nothing which is true or beautiful or good makes complete sense in any immediate context of history; therefore we must be saved by faith. Nothing we do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone; therefore we are saved by love.

~Reinhold Niebuhr

Love people even in their sin, for that is the semblance of divine love and is the highest love on earth. Love all of God's creation, the whole and every grain of sand of it. Love every leaf, every ray of God's light. Love the animals, love the plants, love everything. If you love everything, you will perceive the divine mystery in things. Once you perceive it, you will begin to comprehend it better every day. And you will come at last to love the whole world with an all embracing love.

~Fyodor Dostoyevsky

Faith is a knowledge within the heart, beyond the reach of proof.

~Kahlil Gibran

God is a good worker but loves to be helped.

~Basque proverb

I never ask God to give me anything; I only ask him to put me where things are.

~Mexican proverb

When there is stillness in the motion of our days, life mysteries are revealed.

~Chinese proverb

If we are to better the future we must disturb the present.

~Catherine Booth

He that gives should never remember, he that receives should never forget.

~The Talmud

Choosing Peace

John Dear

To live a life of peace, we must practice peace with all we meet, indeed, with the whole world. To practice this publicly, we consciously reject the chaos around us and steadfastly choose peace. Once we make that choice, a whole new journey begins.

Throughout our lives, we are invited to make choices. Most of our energy is spent deciding over insignificant matters. But as we push beyond these mundane choices, we come upon eternal questions: What does it mean to be human? What shall I do with my life? How do I prepare for death? How can I know God?

As we contemplate these questions, we find the great choices opening before us: whether or not to accept that God is God; whether or not to live in peace.

John Dear is a Jesuit priest and former Executive Director of the Fellowship of Reconciliation. He has worked with the homeless in Washington, D.C., Richmond, Virginia, and El Salvador, and at a human rights center in Belfast, Northern Ireland. This article is excerpted from his most recent book, Living Peace: A Spirituality of Contemplation and Action *©2001 by John Dear, S.J., published by Doubleday. Used by permission. Author photo by Sally Savage.*

Choosing peace invites our daily participation in the greatest spiritual and moral struggle facing humanity, the lifelong struggle of nonviolence. If we fully choose peace, we can change the world. A lifelong pursuit of peace promises not only inner adventure, struggling with the forces of chaos and violence (the deepest meaning for our existence), but the possibility of affecting the very course of history.

Whether we radiate quiet peace like a Buddhist monk or capture the world's imagination like Mahatma Gandhi, a life of peace bears fruit for humanity.

I remember the day I was confronted with my great choice. In June 1982, I was twenty-one, living with my parents in Washington, D.C., about to enter the Society of Jesus, a worldwide community of Catholic priests. I decided that before I committed my life to following Jesus, I wanted to go to Israel and see for myself the land where Jesus lived and died.

My plans for a typical pious pilgrimage were shattered, though. As I was boarding the plane to Tel Aviv, Israel was invading Lebanon. I was heading into war. Stepping off the plane in Tel Aviv, I was greeted by armed soldiers who searched me, questioned me, and finally waved me on with machine guns. For the next five weeks, I wandered through the Holy Land, visiting sacred sites, talking with Israelis, and reading the Gospels. But the reality of the war shocked me, terrified me, and changed my life.

After exploring every corner of Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and Nazareth, I spent my last week camping out by myself along the Sea of Galilee. It was beautiful. Each morning, I rose with the sun, swam in the cool water, and meditated on the teachings of Jesus, who lived and worked along the north shore of Galilee, in the village of Capernaum.

Every day, I climbed a little hill on the north shore near

the ruins of Capernaum to pray in the Chapel of the Beatitudes. The eight-sided chapel is surrounded by palm trees, cactus, and green shrubs. There I would sit in silence and read the words of scripture engraved on the walls. I would walk out onto the balcony and look at the blue sea. The view was breathtaking. For hours, I would read the Sermon on the Mount, look at the sea, and pray for guidance.

As my time in Galilee drew to a close, I made one last visit to the Chapel of the Beatitudes. I sat alone in the chapel reading the words written on the eight windows:

> Blessed are the poor in spirit. Theirs is the reign of heaven.
> Blessed are those who mourn. They shall be comforted.
> Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice. They shall be satisfied.
> Blessed are the merciful. They shall be shown mercy.
> Blessed are the pure in heart. They shall see God.
> Blessed are the peacemakers. They shall be called sons and daughters of God.
> Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of justice. Theirs is the reign of heaven.
> Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven. (Matthew 5:3-12)

"I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your heavenly God, for God makes God's sun rise

on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust. Be compassionate as your heavenly God is compassionate." (Matthew 5:44-45)

Suddenly, the words of Jesus hit me as if for the first time. As a light went on, I thought to myself, *Oh my God, I think he's serious!*

I walked onto the balcony and looked out at the sea, the distant mountains, the clear blue sky.

"Are you trying to tell me something, God?" I said aloud, looking up at the sky. "Do you want even me to become a peacemaker, to hunger and thirst for justice, to love my enemies?"

"Okay, God," I said out loud. "I promise to live the life of peace, to live out these Beatitudes for the rest of my life—on one condition: if you give me a sign."

With that I put my fist down on the stone wall, proud of my conditional commitment.

Just then, two Israeli war jets fell through the sky, breaking the sound barrier with sonic booms, over the Sea of Galilee, flying low straight toward me! I ducked instinctively. They raced directly over me and the Chapel of the Beatitudes and, seconds later, dropped several bombs along the border between Israel and Lebanon.

I rose and looked back up at the sky.

"Okay God," I said, shaking. "I promise to dedicate myself to peace and justice for the rest of my life—and I'll never ask for a sign again!"

As a Christian, I committed myself to live according to the Beatitudes, the Sermon on the Mount, and Jesus' peacemaking life. That meant, like Jesus, I would be required to find inner peace and publicly oppose violence and war, pursuing a world of peace and justice for all.

The next day, I traveled to the Israeli border, to the town of Queryat Shemona. There I saw tanks, jeeps, and heavy military equipment roll into Lebanon. Armed soldiers milled about. War, in its abrupt contrast to the message of the Chapel of the Beatitudes, shocked me and confirmed my choice. Two weeks later, I entered the Jesuit Novitiate, a Catholic seminary in Wernersville, Pennsylvania, for two years of prayer and religious training.

Now, twenty years later, I realize that we have to choose to live in peace every day of our lives. We don't have to go to the Middle East to see war or hear Christ's plea for peace.

Every moment offers us God's invitation to live in God's own peace. Wherever we are, we can reject violence and war, and take up the exciting journey by proclaiming God's reign of peace here on earth.

The challenge is to start to journey, to stay faithful, and to delve into a life of peace. Though there will be many days when the journey will seem futile, daunting, even hopeless, over time we come to realize that the journey itself is the life of peace! All we have to do is choose to take up that journey and stay faithful.

"All the way to heaven is heaven," St. Catherine of Siena once said. Once we make the choice to live a life of peace, we will receive all the direction we need.

Ecstatic Music: A Mini Retreat

Rachel Harris

Certain pieces of music can carry us to the heights of joy. Music has an enormous power to carry us into different emotional realms. No matter how depressed we are or how dire our circumstances, music can give us a brief psychological vacation from our suffering. It can carry us into joyous feelings or at least remind us that joy is a possibility. Joyful music is helpful in dealing with depression, but joy is not the opposite of depression. Joy is pure delight in being alive, ranging from deep contentment to ecstatic exaltation, as in much Hindu chanting.

Joy that reaches spiritual heights includes feelings of ecstasy and bliss. We are carried away, beyond the limited confines of our everyday rational minds. Playing music, singing, chanting, and listening to music are frequent pathways to joy and bliss in every spiritual and cultural tradition. The rhythms and instruments are different,

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but all the world's religions have sacred music. The key to surrendering to ecstatic music is to listen with your whole body, not just your ears. Give yourself up to the music; let yourself be carried away.

Preparation for Retreat: Select music that, for you, is ecstatic: the Ninth Symphony, including "Ode to Joy," by Beethoven, *Appalachian Spring*, by Aaron Copeland; or spirituals sung by Jessye Norman. You may want to experiment with a wider range of world music or traditional chanting. Set up the player so it's very easy to turn on.

Step 1: Entering into Retreat

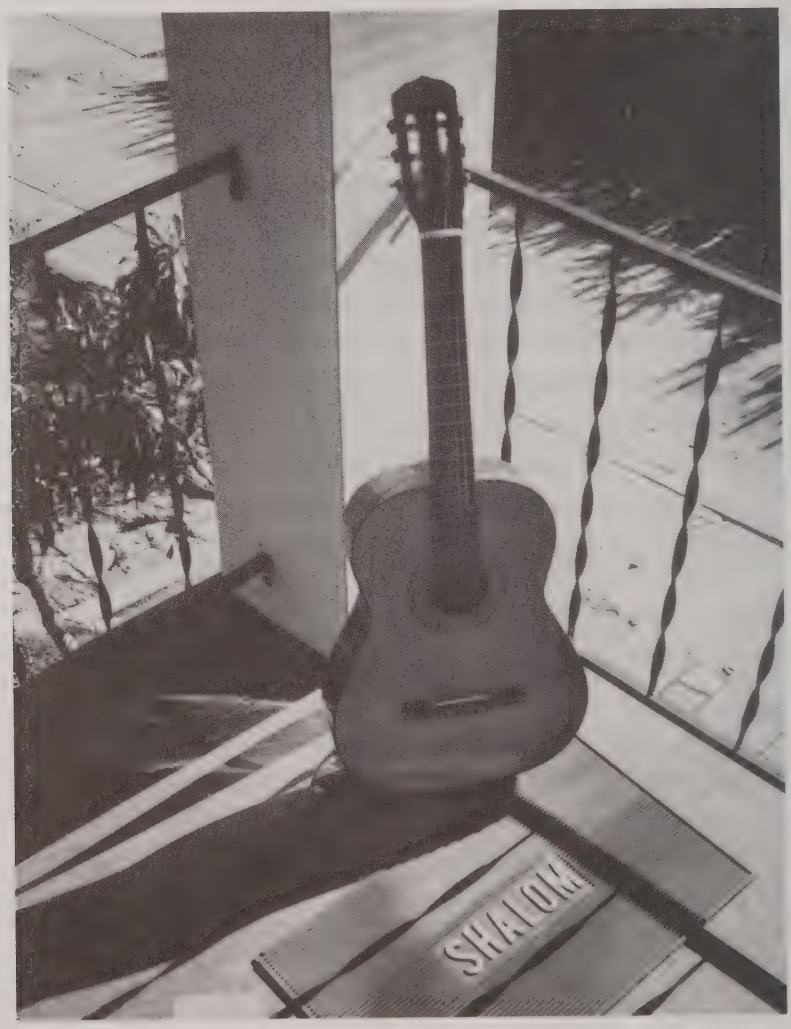
This first step is very important, because the more relaxed you are, the more you can open up to the music. So take a full five minutes and lie down with pillows and blankets in a very comfortable position. You may appreciate pillows under your knees to give your back extra support. Lie on your back with your arms comfortably at your sides and your palms facing up. With every exhale, allow your body to relax a tiny bit more. Let the floor support the weight of your body. Feel the temperature of the air on your skin, especially on your palms.

Step 2: Start the music

For the next twelve minutes, give yourself up completely to the music. Feel it with your body. Let the sound enter, not just through your ears but through your palms, your heart center, or your third eye in the middle of your forehead. Imagine you can let yourself dissolve into music. Lose yourself in it. Let the music carry you to whatever heights of joy you can reach. Surrender to the music so completely that you no longer exist separately from it.

Step 3: Returning to the World

You will need the last three minutes to focus your breathing. Feel the floor and pillows underneath you. Feel the movement of your rib cage as you inhale and exhale. Remember your experience of joy in music so you can reconnect with it during the day.



Robert F. Campbell

'Tis the Gift

Kathleen Diegnan

The American Shakers, more formally known as the United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearing, remain one of the most mysterious and intriguing of the many religious groups to develop on American soil. Originating in England in the 1740s during a wave of revivalism, they rode those currents of religious enthusiasm across the Atlantic Ocean. Settling in upstate New York, they enjoyed their largest expansion in the 1840s when they numbered over 6,000 members in fifty-eight families living in communities from New England to Kentucky. Today there are a handful of Shakers in Sabbathday Lake, Maine. So much could be said of this rich, vibrant experiment in Christianity, but at the root of their legacy is a gospel of gifts.

The Shakers stand in a very ancient and original tradition of believers who experienced with Jesus that the

Kathleen Diegnan is the author of Christ Spirit: The Eschatology of the American Shakers *published by Scarecrow Press. She is also Director of the Iona Spirituality Institute and Associate Professor of Religious Studies at Iona College in New Rochelle, NY.*

Divine Spirit was the supreme gift. The Shakers believed that the Holy Spirit empowered Christ and, likewise, all who received this same anointing or baptism of the Spirit would also be divinely empowered. A pentecostal people, the Shakers experienced the outpouring of the Spirit on their flesh, as the prophets had promised and post-Easter Christians had sung. This made the Shakers millenialists: people who believed that in their time and experience a redemptive age had dawned when spiritual life would suffer a surge, an intensification, an evolutionary leap.

This uniquely Shaker breakthrough in spiritual consciousness was embodied in a young English woman named Ann Lee who, after intense and dramatic suffering, experienced a release which she called "rebirth." But Ann Lee was not simply reborn in this old world; rather she was born—here and now—into the world and the age to come. In this new "resurrection state," she experienced Christ's Second Appearing not outside herself but within herself, as her very self. She believed that this dramatic experience was not for herself alone but for anyone who would take up the cross of celibacy as the sign and medium of radical transformation.

Shaker life was expressive and charismatic. The mental and emotional states they nurtured and sustained through ecstatic song and dance opened them to visionary states. The overflow of such ecstatic energy was meticulously employed in the design of beautiful but functional goods and technologies that would simplify and bring order to human life.

Shakers invented the clothespin, the flat broom, the circular saw, and textiles for wrinkle-free fabrics. They began the seed industry. Shaker seeds sold in small packets helped make America fruitful. Their novelty in architecture

included breathtaking spiral staircases and circular barns. The functional beauty and perfection in furniture making is a national treasure. Yet the true value of the now priceless Shaker chair, as Thomas Merton once noted, rests in its creation by one who believed that an angel might come and sit in it. For all that, the late sister Mildred Barker of Sabbathday Lake was heard to protest, "I don't want to be remembered as a chair!" This great American experiment in communitarianism left us more than crafts and furniture. What then is the real legacy of the Shakers?

From my close reading of the Shaker legacy, I see several spiritual gifts that continue to challenge us today. First, the Shakers had a unique theology and God-language. For them God was perceived as Mother/Father. This singular intuition influenced every aspect of their consciousness and was expressed in male and female complementarity that was the signature of Shaker thought, mores, and culture. Their holistic way of seeing and living lay in recognizing the feminine divine, the eclipsed dimension of the sacred. God's mother nature was celebrated as holy wisdom, and Shakers allowed this balancing insight to incarnate in an extraordinarily egalitarian and prophetic way of being male and female together. Their instinct to balance opposites led them to design a communal life that supported the continuous restoration and renewal of human energy as well. Each day had time and space for work and play, silence and speech, stillness and dancing, order and creative frenzy.

Balance each day with work and play, stillness and dancing.

Another Shaker gift is their commitment to progress and ongoing revelation in all areas of life. They were open

to letting things be, letting things change, letting things die. They had the courage to resist a deadening dogmatism, and the patience to wait on the Spirit for guidance and wisdom. This capacity for "being in the moment" is a hallmark of the Shaker way that discloses "the gift to be simple" in the midst of the grand complexity of the universe. Shakers sought to "let go of big I and let little I be," born of the habits of forgiveness and plain speech that leads to the "practical peace" grounding all the other gifts.

In their cultural legacy, the Shakers show us that ecstatics can be pragmatic, and earth can conform in some degree to our visions of heaven. They remind us that creativity is our vocation, and that the highest form of creativity is love laboring toward a "union" that never dies. They challenge us to commit everything to soul-development. The Shakers knew that rebirth requires constant conversion and hoped that "to turn, turn" would likewise be our delight as we follow the lead they charted and explored on the sacred path toward transformation. This is their gift to us.

The Sometime Hermit

Terry Urekew

The sometime hermit
I am
Immersed in this
starkly simple space.

A crazy hermit
with coffee mug in hand.

Awake to the wonder
of utter nothing—

which contains, of course,
the immensity of stars
come down to rest
burning grass on the meadow at night.

I drop the trappings
of life's great lies
and peel off layers
to reach my soul—

Terry Urekew, O.P.A., is single parent to six teenagers, a street paramedic with the local county ambulance service, and an associate member of the Kentucky Dominican congregation of St. Catherine of Siena. She has been writing poetry for more than thirty years and received an honorable mention in the first Thomas Merton Prize for Poetry of the Sacred in 1999.

which craves silence,
deep blue silence
if silence has color.

The grateful sometime hermit
feasts on the riches
of this poverty
then sated, spent
goes home.

Meditation

Karen Myers

The moon rests encircled and white as a dove
above the winter trees. In the early day
before dawn, the yard is silent,
long past the explosion of insect life,
long gone the robin chorus.
Flowers have bent their heads low
as they bow out. There is no applause.
And I come to the center
where it is empty and dark,
peaceful as the moon is light,
waiting for a spark of snow
soon to descend through the trees.

Karen Myers' poems have appeared in the Schuylkill Valley Journal *and* Wheatsheaf. *She lives in Philadelphia.*

WAR

"Now, for the first time, America faces the prospect of war in which her own towns and cities will be the battleground." (News item, Sept. 2001)

I.
We know that this is war, and we must make
Guns and tanks and ships and planes
and planes
and planes . . .
What is it like, I wonder, to see a building sway
And finally topple
And you under it?
Oh yes, there will be rubble and dirt
And hungry faces
searching . . .
And we will think that it's been a long time
Since we sat at the breakfast table
And saw the sunlight threaded through organdy,
Dancing in the depths of orange juice.

II.
A haggard priest in dirty clericals
Wandering with his wafers
Blesses a dead man lying in the street;
The dead man sleeps, face turned skyward:
His soul has been blessed but
His sightless eyes stare at the heavens,

Sybil Harp wrote this poem in 1951 when she was a sophomore in college. It was published in the college literary magazine, a copy of which her college English teacher gave her during her 45th class reunion. Sybil writes, "I guess I have always known that war is madness and that violence can never be redemptive."

Blue beyond belief;
The sun, remembering organdy,
Flits through broken walls, crumbled steps,
And pauses on the dead man's face.
(Do the cries start right away, and mingle with
the explosion,
Or do they wait until the last brick falls,
sending up its own small puff of dust?)
I think that we will know then,
if we never knew before,
What Ugly is.

III.
It's hard to grieve for one,
And harder still to grieve for two . . .
But to grieve for all —
For every hand without a finger
And every home without a family
And every child without a mother
And every soul without a body
Must be Hell;
I will lift up mine eyes
And cry to the heavens
Deliver us!
A solemn tree remains . . .
My prayer soars to its branches
And whispers in the leaves . . .
Deliver us
Deliver us
Deliver us

BOOKS WE'VE ENJOYED

Reviewed by Nan C. Merrill

Love is Stronger than Death: The Mystical Union of Two Souls. Published by Bell Tower, 1997, 222 pages, hardcover. *Mystical Hope: Trusting in the Mercy of God*. Published by Crowley, 2001, 104 pages, hardcover. *Singing the Psalms: How to Chant in the Christian Contemplative Tradition*. Available from the Sounds True catalog: 1-800-333-9185. Books and music by Cynthia Bourgeault.

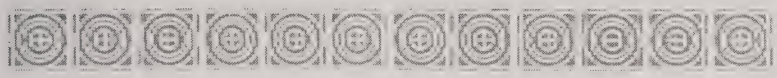
A spiritually luminous relationship between two hermits may seem unlikely, yet *Love is Stronger than Death,* is a powerful and true story of the heart. Rafe, a seventy-year-old-monk, and Cynthia, a medieval scholar and an Episcopal priest, discovered and created together an undying love that was intense, totally honest, and profoundly soulful throughout their three year friendship. Their companionship continued on after Rafe died of a heart attack and remains an abiding partnership beyond death. Bourgeault's writing creates a seamless tapestry of life and death that may well help others on the journey toward conscious, creative, and committed love.

Nan C. Merrill is the author of Psalms for Praying *and* Meditations and Mandalas. *She edits the monthly newsletter* Friends of Silence *and directs retreats. She lives in Jericho, VT.*

Mystical Hope, Bourgeault's most recent book, offers meditations that reflect God's ever present mercy. The mystical hope that Cynthia describes is both compassionate and communal, like a connecting arm that ever holds us in its embrace. She shows that trusting in the mercy of God is to surrender to the peace beyond understanding that will strengthen and reveal hidden depths of hope in others and in the world.

Learning to sing or chant the Psalms under Cynthia's guidance brings a deeper understanding of the Bible and a closer sense of God's presence. In *Singing the Psalms*, a three cassette series, Cynthia, who has been called North America's preeminent expert on the history and practice of psalmody, offers clear explanations, beautiful singing renditions, and suggested chants that can enhance one's own prayer disciplines.

LETTERS & LINKS



Letters to the Editor are edited for brevity and clarity. We appreciate your comments and depend on donations to provide hundreds of copies to readers unable to pay for subscriptions. Consider becoming a special donor today.

I am beginning a course in Spiritual Direction this month. *Sacred Journey* has been a wonderful booklet to read in preparation for this great adventure.

Peggy from Virginia

For some time I have received *Sacred Journey* on a gratis basis.... It has enlightened me and comforted me many times. I am now in a position to pay for a subscription.... Please use [the additional] amount to help wherever necessary.

Gloria from Florida

Sacred Journey is unique and provides great inspiration and joy.

Wanda from Jalisco, Mexico

I read *Sacred Journey* each morning and usually the whole periodical at least twice....[and I am] a person who has piles of unread material in my home!

Mary Ann from Wisconsin

I usually read each issue at one sitting....The fact that each issue draws from the experiences of such varied "seekers" is much appreciated.

Ann from Iowa

Sacred Journey has opened my heart and mind to a better understanding about my new journey.... If I had money, I would send some.... I am only 20 years old and have been in jail for six years now.

Leonard from Alaska

I subscribe to many spiritual and other periodicals, but this is one that I cannot function without. I am a 78-year-old handicapped woman and getting around is very difficult.... I am fortunate in seeing beauty from every window. There are deer, racoons, an occasional fox or coyote and a zillion different birds. God is good!

Betty from California

Sacred Journey is the only journal I read front to back. It speaks to me of the things that are most sustaining and challenging in my life. Keep up the good work.

Elizabeth from New York

I very much enjoy *Sacred Journey*—especially the philosophical articles about how to apply one's faith based life whether from a Jewish or Muslim or Christian or Taoist (whatever) viewpoint.

LeRoy from Florida

I do appreciate the difficulty in continuing to send free copies out of the USA. I cannot describe adequately how much I gain from the contents. Kindly say the biggest "Thank You" to my donor. My prayer thoughts will always surround him/her.

Mary from Nigeria

Sacred Journey's map?
Mystic, magic moments from
Fellowship in Prayer

A Haiku of thanks by Jeffrey from Colorado

Goodbye to a Friend

Kathryn G. Brown, who led Fellowship in Prayer as Executive Secretary and President of the Board of Trustees from 1954-1977, died on October 19, 2001. Kathryn worked for Fellowship in Prayer from its initial days in 1949. She was well-loved by many for the personal letters she wrote and the publication she edited which evolved over half-a-century into *Sacred Journey*. We honor her life and unwavering devotion given to the task of uniting people through prayer.

Resource Organizations

The following organizations have requested we share information with our readers. Fellowship in Prayer offers this as a service and does not sponsor nor necessarily endorse their activities.

Pray for the Children sponsors an annual weekend event for people of all faiths around the world to pray for children to be drug-free and safe. For more information contact: Educating Voices, Inc. (630) 420-9493 or visit www.prayforthechildren.net.

CUSA offers friendship and support for the disabled and chronically ill and is open to all regardless of religious affiliation or finanical means. Send a letter of introduction describing your interests, activities, and disability to: Anna Marie Sopko, 176 West 8th Street, Bayonne, NJ 07002 or email: ams4@juno.com.

Correction

Due to an editing error in our August issue, we incorrectly identified the relationship between the prophet Muhammad and Ali, his son-in-law. Shi'ite Muslims follow Ali's sayings in addition to the teachings of the Qur'an.

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